

# *Metamicroptera christophi* Przybyłowicz, 2005, a hitherto rarely recorded species new for Malawi (Lepidoptera: Erebidae, Arctiinae, Syntomini)

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## Abstract

The genus *Metamicroptera* Hulstaert, 1923 and *Metamicroptera christophi* Przybyłowicz, 2005 (Erebidae: Arctiinae) is recorded for the first time from Malawi. This new record provides a link between Tanzanian and Zimbabwean localities of the taxon suggesting that the species may be continuously distributed along the subequatorial grass savannah biome of Eastern Africa.

**Keywords:** Lepidoptera, Erebidae, Arctiinae, Syntomini, *Metamicroptera christophi*, new record, Malawi.

*Metamicroptera christophi* Przybyłowicz, 2005 una especie raramente registrada, nueva para Malawi (Lepidoptera: Erebidae, Arctiinae, Syntomini)

## Resumen

El género *Metamicroptera* Hulstaert, 1923 y *Metamicroptera christophi* Przybyłowicz, 2005 se cita por la primera vez para Malawi. Este nuevo registro, proporciona un vínculo entre las localidades del taxón de Tanzania y Zimbabue, lo que sugiere que la especie puede estar distribuida continuamente a lo largo del bioma de la sabana de pastos subecuatoriales de África oriental.

**Palabras clave:** Lepidoptera, Erebidae, Arctiinae, Syntomini, *Metamicroptera christophi*, nueva cita, Malawi.

## Introduction

*Metamicroptera christophi* Przybyłowicz, 2005 (Erebidae: Arctiinae) is recorded for the first time from Malawi based on a single specimen housed in the Lepidoptera collection of the African Natural History Research Trust in Leominster (ANHRT, the UK).

The species was described by Przybyłowicz (2005) based on a short series of two males from Tanzania and Zambia. The type specimens are housed in the Natural History Museum, London (UK) and Transvaal Museum, Pretoria (RSA) respectively.

Since its description, this species had not been detected, neither in any Lepidoptera collection I visited nor among newly collected, fully scrutinized material. Only recently, a single specimen representing *M. christophi* was discovered in the collection of ANHRT among a long series of similar and much commoner specimens of *Metamicroptera rotundata* Hulstaert, 1923.

## Details

The detailed data of the voucher specimen are as follows:

*Metamicroptera christophi* Przybyłowicz, 2005

*Metamicroptera christophi* Przybyłowicz, 2005. *Acta zool. cracov.*, 48B(1-2): 14

MALAWI, Nkhata Bay, Kolwe Forest reserve, 11°36'39"S, 34°14'60"E, 540 m, 1 ♂, 19-IV-2011, R. Yakovlev, leg./ex. coll. R. Yakovlev, ANHRT:2018.32/ANHRTUK 00147953.

The specimen perfectly matches the original description, providing no additional information on possible intraspecific variation in pattern and coloration.

The new locality is not only a new country record for this extremely rare species of arctiine but provides a distributional link between Tanzanian record located much further north and the Zambian one to the south-west (Figure 1). These new data favours the hypothesis that the range of *M. christophi* may be continuous along the subequatorial grass savannah biome of Eastern Africa.

The collecting month (April) indicates that the imago is on the wing at the end of the main rainy season, which in Malawi lasts from December until April (Mungai et al. 2016). However, the length of the entire flying season remains unknown.

*Metamicroptera christophi* (Figure 2A) may be confused with the similar *M. rotundata* (Figure 2B). It is, however, much smaller and shows a markedly reduced white pattern on the forewing (as far as can be judged only by external comparison between the species). The clearest and most discrete diagnostic character is a white colored frons which in *M. rotundata* is entirely black.

With now still only three known specimens, the life history details and ecological and habitat preferences of *M. christophi* remain completely unknown. The females of either *Metamicroptera* species are not described yet, although they are expected to be markedly larger and sexually dimorphic from the known males as it is common in other “*Balacra*-like” African Syntomini (Przybyłowicz, 2009).

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## References

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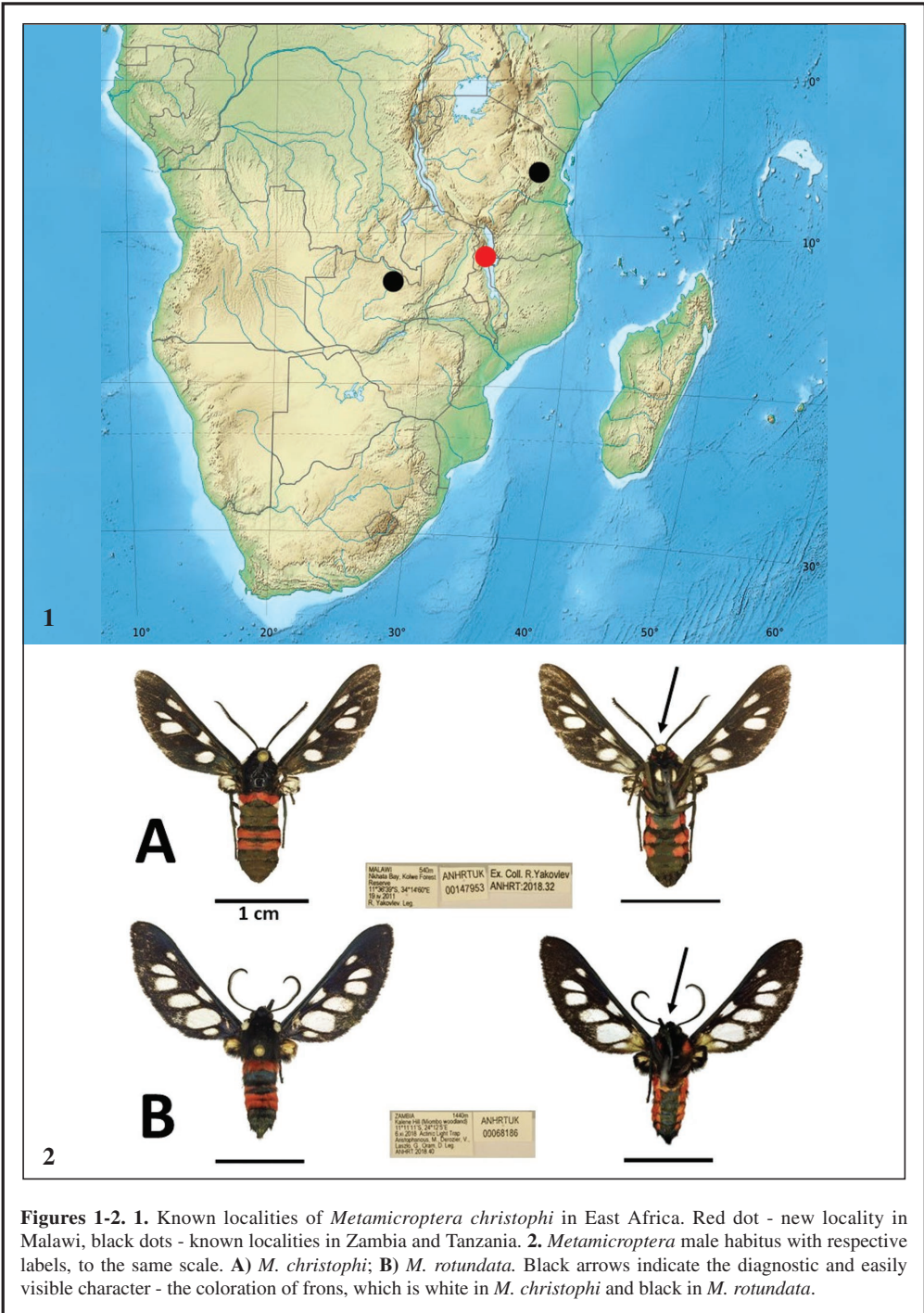
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**Figures 1-2.** 1. Known localities of *Metamicroptera christophi* in East Africa. Red dot - new locality in Malawi, black dots - known localities in Zambia and Tanzania. 2. *Metamicroptera* male habitus with respective labels, to the same scale. **A)** *M. christophi*; **B)** *M. rotundata*. Black arrows indicate the diagnostic and easily visible character - the coloration of frons, which is white in *M. christophi* and black in *M. rotundata*.